RUSSIAN OUTLETS TO THE SEA

With Special Reference to the Bosporus and Dardanelles

Questions concerning Russian access to the sea fall into two categories:

1) Problems imposed by the geographical factors of location in relation to land and water, climatic zones, and the distribution of population, resources, and areas of greatest productive capacity;

2) Problems created and perpetuated by the attitudes and assumptions of nations with reference to the control of movement of surface ships en route to and from Russian ports.

1) The geographical factors

All ships moving between Russia and the Atlantic by way of the Baltic Sea must pass through the narrow waters of the Sound or the Belts, the Kattegat and Skagerrak, and the open waters of the North Sea. Sweden and Finland are identically situated with reference to these waters.

All ships moving between Russia and either the Atlantic Ocean or the Indian Ocean by way of the Mediterranean Sea must pass through the narrow waters of the Bosporus, the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles, and if en route to or from Atlantic ports they must also pass through restricted waters between Italy and Africa and in the Straits of Gibraltar; if en route to or from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean they must traverse the Suez Canal. Rumania, and at present Bulgaria, are similarly situated with reference to these waters; and inland countries with access to the sea by way of the Danube (Austria and Hungary, and to a certain extent Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Germany) are likewise concerned with rights through the Straits.

All goods and people moving by surface facilities direct between the Caspian Sea and the Indian Ocean must traverse Iran by railroad, or by much more costly means of transport by road.

All ships moving between Russia and the Pacific and its sea arms must pass between Japanese islands, or between Korea and Japanese islands.

The Arctic Ocean affords access to shipping going to and from Russian ports to a very limited extent; except for the minor Arctic ports of Norway and Finland, Murmansk is the only Eurasian port in the entire Arctic which is ice-free the year round. By comparison with North America, the Arctic affords even more limited access to northern Alaska and northern Canada for a short season.

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These physical factors are so indelibly inscribed upon the earth's surface that they might be observed from another planet.

Ice is a factor for longer or shorter periods on all the routes above referred to, but of course least in the south--in the Black Sea and therefore in relation to routes through the Bosporus and Dardanelles, and also in the Caspian Sea and therefore in relation to the overland connection with the Persian Gulf.

Russia's situation is unique among large nations in that it is the only country that has no contact with the rest of the world by surface ships except through narrow passages. Ships of every other large country and of nearly all small ones may start from their own ports on an open ocean, and at once fan out on divergent routes into the seven seas.

Russia's outlets to the sea are seen on the globe as deeply entrant bays or seas. But when one recalls that ocean transport costs usually about one-tenth as much per ton-mile as that by the most economical land transport, these Russian ports will be seen to link Russia more closely to the rest of the world than do most of its land connections. Cost-distances in transport, and time-distances in communications and travel, are more significant than mere space-distances on the globe.

(a) The Bosporus and Dardanelles routes. The route through Turkish waters, connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, is more than 160 miles long. (See the accompanying map.) The Bosporus is about 17 miles in length, varying from 0.5 to 1.5 miles wide and from 20 to 66 fathoms in depth. The route through the Sea of Marmara is 110 miles long; there are two principal island groups, and two single islands. The Dardanelles is 35 miles in length, 0.7 to 4 miles wide, averaging 2 miles, and 25 to 55 fathoms deep. There is a strong surface current from the Black Sea to the Aegean, especially in summer, occasioned by the discharge of water into the Black Sea from the great Russian rivers and the Danube and the lower water level of the Mediterranean due to evaporation in its eastern basin. In summer the current is strengthened by the prevailing north and northeast winds, but in winter the winds from the southwest decrease its velocity. Currents up to 4 knots are sometimes met by counter currents of some force. In a hard winter the Bosporus may freeze, and in more mild winters ice enters it from the Black Sea. Storms and fog may be encountered at the Black Sea entrance of the Bosporus, but southward, in the Sea of Marmara and the Dardanelles, the weather is generally fine. The engagement of pilots is required by the Turkish Government.

The physical capacity of the Bosporus-Dardanelles route greatly exceeds the maximum shipping of all nations that may now be anticipated. The Straits of Gibraltar are 7.75 miles wide at the narrowest point, and the channels between Sicily and Africa much wider, so that there is no physical limit to the shipping through the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. The Suez Canal, 87.5 miles long, with a minimum depth of about 36 feet, accommodated 36,491,332 tons of shipping in 1937.

The Russian area tributary to the Black Sea embraces all of southern and much of central European Russia and southwestern Asiatic Russia. In it are located the great grain producing regions, most of Russia's industrial plants, and well more than half of Russia's population. Russian trade through the Bosporus and Dardanelles increased steadily until three years prior to the outbreak of the war, when internal economy and policy materially reduced it.

British shipping through the Dardanelles and Bosporus has often exceeded that of Russia.

(b) The Baltic-North Sea route. All ships from the Baltic Sea and its tributary arms (Gulf of Bothnia, Finland and Riga) must go out through the lower end of the Baltic (about 50 miles wide at its narrowest point between Germany and Sweden), and thence by either of three channels, the Sound (between Sweden and the largest Danish island, Sjaelland), the Great Belt or the Little Belt (both wholly between Danish territories), thence into the Kattegat (between Denmark and Sweden) and the Skagerrak (between Denmark and Norway), into the North Sea.

The Sound, or Öresund, which is about 56 miles long, has a minimum width of 2 miles and a minimum depth of 6 to 9 fathoms. The Great Belt, 62 miles long, is the most used of the three courses, and has a minimum width of navigable channel of about 200 yards to one-half mile, with a depth of about 7 fathoms. The Little Belt, adjacent to the Danish peninsula, is only about 600 yards wide at its narrowest point, and has a minimum depth of 7 to 10 fathoms. These are some of the narrowest passages on any of the international shipping lanes, but their physical capacity is much greater than the actual shipping at any time thus far. Denmark does not require the employment of Danish pilots, but experience in the devious and often narrow channels is essential to safe navigation. It may be expected that electronic devices, such as those that make possible the landing and take-off of airplanes in fog, will facilitate the passage of steamships through channels such as these.

(c) The rail route between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. A standard gauge railroad from Bandar Shah, Iran, on the Caspian Sea, to Bandar Shahpur, and later with a branch to Khorramshahr, Iran, on the Persian Gulf, about 800 miles long, has been completed and has carried a great quantity of vital supplies to Russia during the war. An extension from Tehran northwestward toward Tabriz is not finished, so that traffic direct to the Caucasus must still go some distance by truck between railheads. Remarkable railway engineering construction and operation was accomplished by the British, Russians and Americans, 1941-1945, until about 5,500 tons a day went in to Russia by this route in early 1945.

This rail route across Iran may prove to be of considerable importance in the future, connecting the Volga River-Caspian Sea shipping with the Indian Ocean by way of the Persian Gulf.

(d) Outlets to the Pacific. Vladivostok, eastern terminus of the Trans-Siberian Railway (which passes all the way around Manchuria to reach that port), is on the Sea of Japan, and just north of the northeastern point in Korea. The principal shipping routes between Vladivostok and the United States cross the Sea of Japan and pass between Hokkaido and Honshu. The harbor of Vladivostok is frozen over for an average of about 3 months each year. Shipping to the south, to China, Malaya and the Indian Ocean, passes through the Sea of Japan, Korea Strait (between Korea and Kyushu), and the East China Sea (west of the Ryukyu or Liuchiu Islands), and close to Formosa.

Dairen, in the Kwantung Leased Territory, is the principal port of Manchuria, and terminus of the Manchurian railroad, which affords the most direct rail connection between the Pacific coast and the Trans-Siberian Railway. The "Chinese Eastern Railway", which crossed Manchuria to a junction near Vladivostok, also turned southwest from Harbin to Changchun; it was built and remained on the Russian gauge (5' 0") until the Japanese converted it to standard gauge (4' 8.5"). From Changchun through Mukden to Dairen, the "Manchuria Railway" was standard gauge. The bay freezes slightly in winter, but not sufficiently to hinder shipping; icebreakers are needed in the inner harbor at Dairen. Pilotage for the inner harbor is compulsory but free.

2) International problems

All of the limitations which are inherent in geography affect every country on earth which maintains contact with Russia by sea. Every nation which is interested in Russian markets, resources and products--and this certainly includes the United States--is confronted by these same narrow passages on the routes to and from Russia just as much as is the Soviet Union itself. These nodes or restrictions on the routes appear on the map adjacent to Russia, and at the far end of the routes as viewed from other countries, but the effect is the same for all when considered in relation to any peace-oriented world economy.

The rivalries of centuries in which empires, kingdoms and principalities strove to control or even strangle the shipping of one, or to break the bonds imposed by others, are recorded in the history of Russian outlets to the sea. Memoranda prepared in the Department of State on various aspects of these problems within the last three years epitomize the literature and statistical data on the subject. The arrangements effected by treaties and conventions, however, sometimes have little or nothing to do with the practical problems arising from the physical factors imposed by geography which have been discussed above; they have little of the common sense approach manifest in such international agreements as those relating to the International Ice Patrol or the maintenance of the Cape Spartel Light.

The time has come to take into account the great changes of the last century, namely:

(a) Almost all of the empires involved in the struggles for control of the Straits have disappeared;

(b) The machine age, industrialization, and mechanized transportation, have increased shipping through these Straits many fold, and much greater increases are to be anticipated;

(c) The airplane and radio ignore these details of land and water distribution, and they create new situations and attitudes which transform the old problems of surface shipping through the straits;

(d) The emerging attitudes expressed in the Declaration and in the Charter of the United Nations and in related documents, such as

> "... the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world..."
>
> "... There must be an expansion of the whole world economy to provide the purchasing power sufficient to maintain an adequate diet for all."

seem to require an approach to such problems as Russian outlets to the sea and the world's access to Russian ports predicated on expanding trade and peaceful solution of all international problems.

Problems of the Bosporus and the Dardanelles. If Russia were located where Canada is, and if Russian access to the open ocean were by way of a sea just east of the United States and thence around Long Island and through the East River adjacent to New York (comparable to the Bosporus in relation to Istanbul), Americans could better appreciate the problems of the Straits.

Actually, existing treaty restrictions on the use of the Turkish Straits by the Soviet Union are, on the whole, reasonable and practicable. The element of fear, however, casts its shadow.

The Montreux Convention of July 20, 1936, is the present statute regulating passage through the Straits. It provides for complete freedom of transit and navigation in times of peace for merchant vessels with any kind of cargo, subject only to sanitary regulations. Fees and taxes that the Turkish Government may levy for sanitary inspection, lighthouses and life-saving services are regulated by the convention. During a war in which Turkey is neutral the same conditions apply. If Turkey is a belligerent, the vessels of neutral nations may still use the Straits on condition that they do not assist the enemy, and subject to Turkish regulations as to the route they take.

All naval powers may send war vessels through the Straits in time of peace, but the maximum tonnage of warships that a non-Black Sea power may have in the Black Sea at any one time is 45,000. Powers not bordering the Black Sea may not send more than 15,000 tons of naval vessels through the

Straits at any one time. In time of war, if Turkey is neutral, the same conditions as in peace time are to prevail except that belligerent powers are not to send naval vessels through the Straits. If Turkey is at war it may close the Straits to all foreign warships.

The Soviet Union's primary concern seems to be to do away with the potentially unfavorable strategic situation in which it is placed regarding the Straits. It is afraid that some unfriendly power might close the Straits to its trade and warships. Even if Turkey were friendly to the Soviet Union at all times, she is not strong enough to defend the Straits from attack by a major power such as Germany. Great Britain's historic role of preventing Russian penetration into the Mediterranean is presumably not forgotten in Moscow. Turkey's inability to keep the waterway inviolable was demonstrated in the course of the present war, when the Germans sent partially dismantled warships from the Black Sea into the Aegean. Great Britain was the principal one to protest this action to Turkey, but the Soviet Union had as much at stake.

Conclusion. Because it is now profitable to buy and sell many commodities half way round the world, and feasible to go and come anywhere quickly and at moderate expense, it may be expected that peoples in almost all parts of the earth will resent or resist any control or barrier which they believe to be imposed by other countries for their own supposed advantage. The United States will desire unhampered trade and cultural relations with every quarter of the globe, as will almost every other country in at least one direction.

It would appear that Russia's desire for unfettered outlets to the sea and the desire of the United States for equally free inlets to Russia will henceforth practically coincide. In fact, they may be recognized by many other countries to be identical with their own interests, as a matter of principle of world-wide applicability.

GE:SWBoggs:MHH
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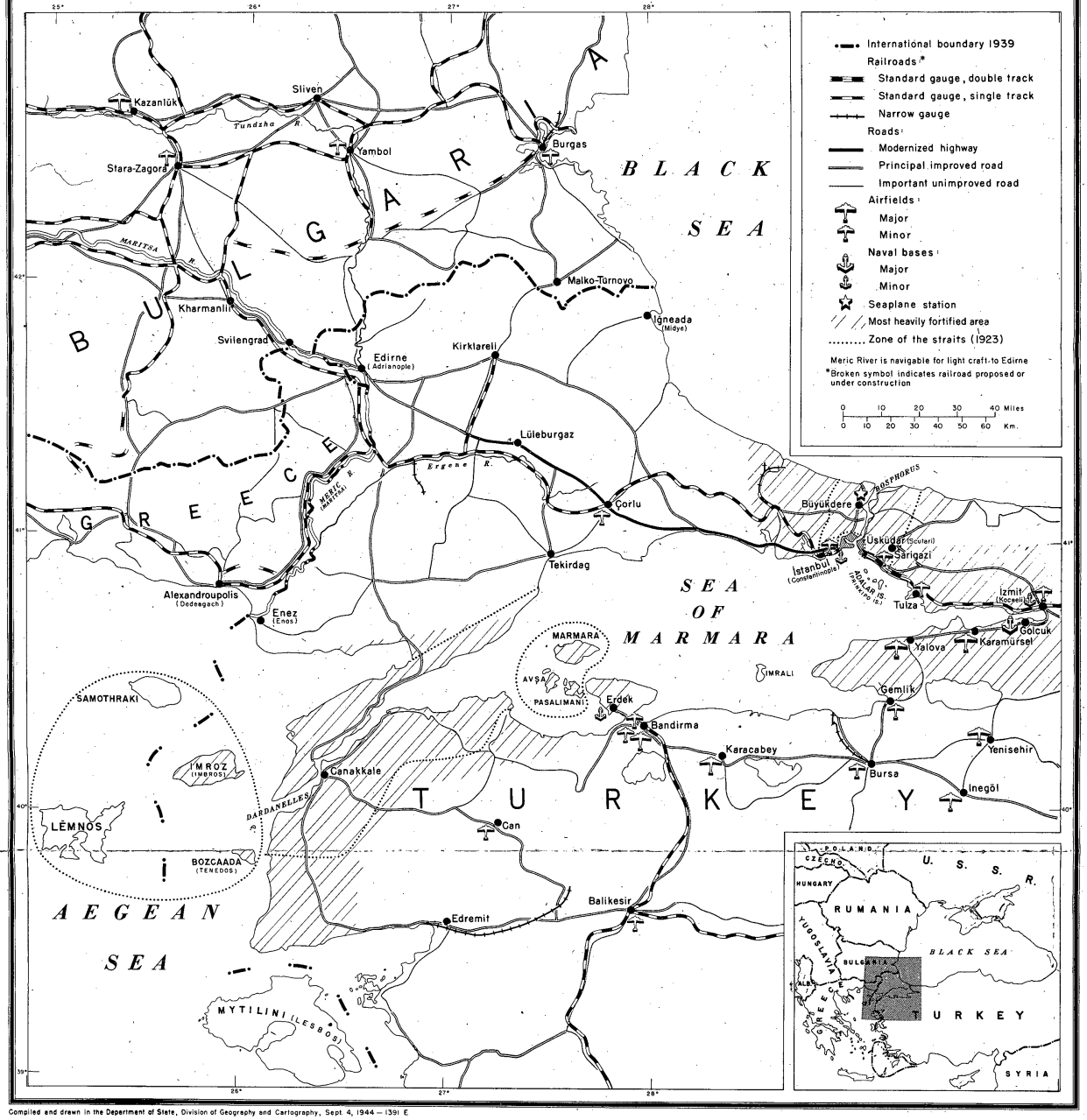
Turkish Series Map 1

ZONE OF THE STRAITS AND SURROUNDING AREA : STRATEGIC FACTORS



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